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UNCLAS CARACAS 002655

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SUBJECT: VENEZUELAN REFERENDUM UPDATE: AUGUST 18

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OAS and Carter Center Announce Audit  
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12. (U) OAS Secretary General Cesar Gaviria and former President Jimmy Carter announced August 17 that the National Electoral Council (CNE) had agreed to conduct a second audit of the voting results that would compare the paper ballots with the actas (tally sheets) generated after the results were transmitted to the CNE. While President Carter reiterated that the Carter Center had no reason to doubt the integrity of the electoral system or the accuracy of preliminary the results he said he hoped the audit would relieve opposition concerns that fraud occurred. The audit would be based on the paper ballots from a random sample of 150 voting tables, and the actas from those machines. According to the Carter Center, the voting tables to be audited will be selected at 6 pm August 18 and the audit will begin at 8 am August 19. All of the machines and corresponding data would be pulled in the presence of the international observers and government and opposition representatives. Carter warned that it is possible that the ballots may not match the number of votes recorded on the actas since some people may not have deposited their receipts as they were supposed to. He doubted, however, that a sufficient number would be missing to dramatically change the results.

13. (U) Gaviria noted that he was aware of the opposition's allegations that the machines were programmed with a ceiling, after which SI votes were converted to No votes once they reached a certain level. Nevertheless, he described these allegations as vague and suggested that the opposition be more precise so the observers could better investigate the claim. Both Gaviria nor Carter discounted the possibility that the urns into which voter deposited their paper receipts would be tampered with before the audit.

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Opposition/Government Reaction  
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14. (U) The opposition reacted to the announcement with concern that the terms of the audit would not allow observers to detect the irregularities the opposition claims have occurred (septel). Opposition spokesman Nelson Rampersad called for a more intense audit that would allow the machines, their memory and their software to be reviewed as well. According to Rampersad, this request is based on information he says proves that approximately 25 percent of the machines (more than 5 thousand) were manipulated to record a similar total of Si and No votes in several voting centers. Sumate President Alejandro Plaz recommended amplifying the sample to 200 machines to avoid finding a result within the margin of error and allowing government and opposition party representatives to choose the terms for selecting the machines to be audited.

15. (U) Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel and Commando Maisanta spokesperson Mari Pili Hernandez welcomed the audit on behalf of the government. Rangel reiterated the government's belief that the vote was legitimate and cited the Carter Center and OAS' original endorsement of the results. He told the opposition they could run all the checks they wanted to, but that they would find nothing wrong. Smartmatic, the company who provided the machines for the vote, also welcomed the audit. Smartmatic President Antonio Mujica told poloffs he considered an audit vital to defend the reputation of his company.

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OAS Reiterates Confidence in Results  
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16. (U) In response to the opposition's claims of irregularities in the voting machines, the OAS released a statement August 18 reiterating their confidence in the results of the recall referendum as announced by CNE Director Francisco Carrasquero on August 16. The OAS said the CNE gave the organization necessary access to adequately monitor the results and outlined the steps the OAS electoral mission took to ensure that the voting machines were secure. The

statement also repeated the electoral mission's confidence in

the initial audit of the 192 machines conducted the day of the vote and the voting process, saying that all who wanted to participate could do so freely and without hindrance.  
Shapiro

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